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March 9, 2006
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NEWS RELEASE

(Media are invited to cover the preview party at 6:45 p.m. on Friday, March 24, at the Dayton Marriott Hotel, 1414 S. Patterson Blvd. David Fogarty, president and general manager of ThinkTV, and Richard Wonderling, writer, producer and director, will talk about the making of the documentary. Others interviewed, including the Bombeck family, will talk about Erma Bombeck's legacy.)

BOMBECK FAMILY, WRITERS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY TO PREVIEW FIRST DOCUMENTARY EVER PRODUCED ABOUT ERMA BOMBECK

DAYTON, Ohio — It's fitting that the first documentary ever produced about Erma Bombeck's life will premiere in her hometown this month at the University of Dayton Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop — with her family in the audience.

Narrated by talk show pioneer and former neighbor Phil Donahue, "Erma Bombeck: A Legacy of Laughter" will be shown to more than 350 writers from around the country on Friday, March 24, as part of the three-day sold-out workshop. Produced by ThinkTV, the half-hour documentary is being distributed nationally by American Public Television (APT). More than 270 public television stations — more than 90 percent of the nation's television markets — plan to air the piece, according to Kitty Lensman, director of marketing and business development for ThinkTV. In Dayton, it will air twice in May, but dates haven't been announced yet.

"In the top 10 markets every station has picked it up, and it's being featured on the cover of APT's newsletter. That's an unheard-of response, considering it's a one-time show, but it speaks of Erma Bombeck's appeal," Lensman said.

The documentary, two years in the making, celebrates one of America's best-loved humorists through recollections from family and friends along with photographs and rare home movies. Bill Bombeck, Erma's widower, and their children, Betsy, Matt and Andy, were all interviewed for the piece and will be in the audience.

"We were real pleased, just delighted with it," said Bill Bombeck in a phone interview from California. "Even for people who don't know anything about her, it's a fascinating story — and it

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should be fascinating to the people of Dayton."

Richard Wonderling, who wrote, produced and directed the documentary, calls it "an intimate look" at Erma Bombeck through the eyes of those closest to her.

"It was a rare experience for me to create this," he said. "I'm sitting at home watching 10 hours of Bombeck family movies, watching these people grow up before my eyes. It was like standing at a picture window, looking in. She wrote about family, so it made sense to focus on family. The Bombeck family was so open to us and so willing to help."

Besides the Bombeck family, others interviewed for "Erma Bombeck: A Legacy of Laughter" include Norma Born, Erma's assistant; Pat Wynn Brown, author and performer; Bruce Cameron, author of *8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter*, and Tim Bete, director of the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop. Andrews McMeel Universal and the University of Dayton, Erma Bombeck's alma mater, provided funding for the program.

"What people loved about Erma and her writing is that they felt she was like their next-door neighbor," said Born, who provided family photos and home movies for the documentary. Other material came out of the University of Dayton's Erma Bombeck Online Museum (www.ErmaMuseum.org), which attracts more than 100,000 visitors annually.

Born in Dayton in 1927, Erma Fiste developed a love for writing early in life. At the age of 16, while attending Patterson Co-Op High School, she talked her way into a job as a copygirl at the *Dayton Herald*. As a student at the University of Dayton, she found moral support from Brother Tom Price, S.M., who encouraged her to write humor for *The Exponent*, the school magazine. One day he told her three words that changed her life: "You can write."

After marrying college classmate Bill Bombeck, settling in suburbia and starting a family, she began writing a column for the *Kettering-Oakwood Times* before joining the *Journal Herald* in Dayton. Three weeks after her first column appeared in the *Journal Herald*, her column was syndicated. At the peak of her career, "At Wit's End," appeared in more than 900 newspapers, reaching 30 million readers.

She also wrote a dozen books, nine of which made *The New York Times*' bestsellers list. For 11 years, she appeared on ABC-TV's "Good Morning America." She was still writing her column for Universal Press Syndicate and developing a new book for HarperCollins Publishers when she died from complications of a kidney transplant a decade ago on April 22, 1996.

"Of her it certainly must be said, and can be said, without exaggeration, we shall never see her likes again," Donahue said in the documentary. "She will live forever in the hearts of millions and millions of readers, men and women alike, and she'll never be forgotten because she...said things that they knew no one else would say."